



State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives
403 Seventh Avenue North
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0312

COURT RECORDS, TENNESSEE – COUNTY COURTS
Cumberland District, 1783-1787
Davidson County, 1783-1790
Washington County, 1779-1806
PAPERS

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INTRODUCTION

These records for Courts of Pleas and Quarter Sessions in Cumberland District (established 1780, renamed Davidson County October 6, 1783), in Davidson County (established October 6, 1783), and in Washington County (established October 6, 1783), and in Washington County (established November 1777) were given to the Tennessee Historical Society by the County Court of Washington County largely through the agency of the Honorable John Allison (1845-1920), Nashville, Tennessee.

The materials in this collection measure .84 linear feet. There are no restrictions on the materials.

Single photocopies of unpublished writings in the Cumberland District, Davidson County, and Washington County Papers may be made for purposes of scholarly research.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection consists of the records for Tennessee Courts of Pleas and Quarter Sessions in Cumberland District, 1783-1787; in Davidson County, 1783-1790; and in Washington County, 1779-1806. The largest portion of records are for Washington County and most records in all counties are for the years prior to 1796, when Tennessee became a state and the counties were still a part of North Carolina. These records list courts cases including land claims, tax assessments, wills probated, members of the county court, commissioners appointed, etc. Names of many pioneer Tennesseans appear.

The first few lines of the records of Cumberland District for 1783-1787 read as follows: "N. Carolina Cumberland Districts, March 4th 1783 ----- At a Committee meet according to adjournment members present Col. James Robertson, Thomas Molloy, George Freeland, Isaac Linsey, David Rounsevall, Ebenezer Titus, James Shane, Samuel Barton." All records were signed by James Robertson and were made by Andrew Ewing (1740-1813) who had been appointed clerk of the court by the Cumberland Compact, 1780, and was later (October 1783) first clerk of the Davidson County Court. Cumberland District contained Fort Nashborough, in 1784, to renamed Nashville. Of special interest is an account of dealings with the Chickasaw Indians in which Thomas Molloy's conduct was exonerated.

There are two volumes of Davidson County Court records. These records were more neatly transcribed and were couched in more formal legal parlance than those of Cumberland District, which Andrew Ewing also wrote. The first volume contains a partial index at the front beginning with the name "Davis." The first entry is October 6th, 1783, and the last, with no daily date, a case in October Term, 1790 (*Josiah Payne v. Andrew McFaddin*). The first entry sets forth the circumstances under which Davidson County and the county court were established and names the appointed members of the court – Anthony Bledsoe, Daniel Smith, James Robertson, Isaac Bledsoe, Samuel Barton, Thomas Molloy, Francis Prince, and Isaac Linsey. The second volume of Davidson County records begins with page 7, an entry for January 5, 1784, and concludes on an unnumbered page with an entry for April 6, 1787.

The earliest record for Washington County is for August 24, 1779. Magistrates present were Joseph Willson, Benjamin Gist, Michael Woods, William Bean, Charles Robertson, Jesse Walton, John Chisholm, and Thomas Houghton. If John Sevier was still clerk of the court, he did not sign the 1779 record or otherwise indicate that he was. Instead, the end of the August term, 1779, was adjourned by the authority of John Carter, Thomas Houghton, Zachariah Isbell, and William Clark. The earliest Washington County records beginning February 23, 1778, and covering the years 1778-1782, were published in Chapter 3, John Allison, *Dropped Stitches in Tennessee History*, Nashville, 1897. They were reprinted in *The American Historical Magazine*, October 1900 (V, no. 4) to July 1901 (VI, no. 3) under the title *Records of Washington County*.

In May 1788, David Allison, Joseph Hamilton, Andrew Jackson, and Archibald Roane were listed as producing an attorney's license "with certificate sufficiently attested of their taking the oath necessary to said office" and were admitted to the bar of Washington County. Also, at the same session commissioners reported in favor of Jonesborough as the best and most convenient location for the Washington County courthouse, prison, and stocks.

On February 3, 1806, the latest Washington County record in this collection, court procedure involved a great many more people and had become more formal, complicated, and verbose. Thus, there were not only the magistrates at the opening of court, but also a panel of fifteen grand jurors was sworn in. Wording had become more formal and explicit, and complete documents were entered into the record. Among these were slave and other bills of sale, receipts, and an indenture of apprenticeship.

A partial list of those whose names appear in the 1806 record reads like a listing of famous persons of families who were prominent in the early history of Tennessee. This partial list follows: Frank Allison, Joseph Britten, Richard Caswell, John Chester, William Colyar, Elihu Embree, Nicholas Fain, Jacob Hair, William Hall, Abraham Job, Tidience Lane, Joseph Martin, David Menefee, Henry Nash, Alexander Outlaw, Jesse Payne, Henry Powell, Charles Robertson (of Sinking Creek), John Sevier, Thomas Sherrill, William Smith, and Isaac Wilson.

CONTAINER LIST

Microfilm Container List

Microfilm Reel # 1

Box 1

Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions

Washington County

1. August, November 1779
2. February, May 1780
3. August, November 1780
4. November, 1780; February 1781
5. May, August 1781
6. February, May 1782
7. August, November 1782
8. February, May 1783
9. August, November 1783
10. February, August 1784
11. November 1784
12. August, November 1785
13. May, August, November 1787; February 1788
14. May 1788 - Andrew Jackson, Archibald Roane, John McNairy, David Allison, license to practice law at this session
15. November 1789; February, May, August 1790

Microfilm Reel # 1

Box 2

Courts – Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions

Washington County

1. February, May, August 1794
2. November 1794; February, May, August, November 1795
3. February, May, August 1795
4. May, August, November 1797
5. February, May, August, November 1798
6. February, May, August 1799
7. 1793; 1794; 1795; 1796; 1797; 1798; 1799; 1800; 1801
8. November 1805; February 1806

Microfilm Reel # 1

Box 3

1. Cumberland District, 1783- 1787
2. Davidson County, North Carolina, 1783-1790; and partial index
3. Davidson County, North Carolina, 1784-1787
4. Davidson County, North Carolina, 1784-1790 (continued)

5. Davidson County, North Carolina, 1784-1790

Name Index

Please see these two published volumes for the name index to this collection:

Tennesseans before 1800 : Washington County / by Marjorie Hood Fischer

Tennesseans before 1800 : Davidson County / by Marjorie Hood Fischer